

Kentucky Employment First Council

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Andy Beshear

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Jamie Link

Secretary, Education and Labor Cabinet

Public Policy Committee Minutes

October 16, 2025
9:00 am – 10:00 am (EST)
Zoom

Members Present

Katie Wolf Whaley, Amy Luttrell, Jeff White, Andrew Johnson, Allison Johnson, and Michelle Thrift

Members Absent

Cora McNabb and Leslie Huffman

Staff Present

Nanci Howard, Anu Kumari, Kristen Beach, and Betty Whittaker

Welcome | Agenda Review

Interim Committee Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, welcomed attendees. The agenda was reviewed by all participants.

Project NEON Update

The remaining Project NEON hours were utilized to advance two priority areas:

- Benefits Planning
- Customized Employment (CE)

Benefits Planner Trainings

Subject-matter expert (SME), Michael Dalto, delivered four trainings, which were recorded for later use. Trainings provided were:

- “*Basic SSDI and SSI Work Incentives*” — 44 attendees
- “*Why On Earth Should I Work My Way Off SSDI*” — 38 attendees
- “*Kentucky Medicaid*” — 29 attendees
- “*HUD Rental Assistance Programs*” — 25 attendees

Recordings were uploaded to OVR’s YesLMS, in-house training system. OVR Staff Assistant, Betty Whittaker, plans to coordinate with OVR training staff to determine appropriate external sharing options (e.g., to provide secure links).

Improving Medicaid Works (Kentucky’s Medicaid Buy-In Program)

More Project NEON updates involved:

- Assembling a five-member advocacy group to urge legislation in the upcoming General Assembly.
- Researching other states’ Medicaid Buy-In programs, specifically, Tennessee, to compile fiscal and policy data.
- Securing donated hours with SME, Annette Shea, a nationally recognized expert in Medicaid Buy-In.
- Applying for more technical assistance hours, due by November 14, 2025.
- Asking Adam Haley (Goodwill) and Jeff White to track opportunities to align the Buy-In effort with broader discussions on benefit cliffs and employment incentives.

Sustainability Planning and Continuing Momentum for 2026

To ensure ongoing impact and long-term sustainability, Project NEON is implementing the following strategies:

- To develop a training update key to facilitate annual updates and ensure the continued accuracy of training content.
- To maintain training recordings for continuous staff development and new employee orientation.
- Plan an upcoming training focused on how to use Disability Benefits 101 (DB101), an interactive online platform designed to enhance benefits counseling and employment planning.

Customized Employment (CE)

Customized Employment projects were led by SME, Karen Lee and Tricia Parkin-Jones.

Key accomplishments included were:

- Completed a gap analysis of CE training and fidelity alignment.
- Developed targeted training enhancements and redesigned the CE process flow for clarity and integration.
- Outlined tools (e.g., referral rubrics) to help counselors identify CE candidates earlier and strengthen discovery and proposal development.
- Intended outcomes included:
 - Systematic tracking of job-seeker outcomes via improved documentation.
 - Enhanced job placement quality and fit for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
 - Expanded provider and VR capacity for individualized CE implementation.
 - Reinforcement of Kentucky's Employment First framework and expanded access to competitive integrated employment (CIE).

Although Project NEON officially concluded, partners continued CE-related work through other resources. A pilot of the redesigned CE training is planned for early 2026.

Order of Selection Update

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation provided an update on the status of the Order of Selection (OOS).

- At the time of this meeting, 3,542 individuals were on the KYOVR waitlist.
- OVR is working with fiscal staff to develop a process for opening categories and serving those currently on the waitlist.
- Emergency regulations were submitted for approval, and once approved, they will go into effect immediately.
 - Under the revised structure:
 - Category 1 will remain *Most Significantly Disabled (MSD)*.
 - Category 2 will become *Significantly Disabled (SD)*.
- OVR Staff have received updated training on OOS and how to implement changes once emergency regulations are approved.
- Consumers are encouraged to continue applying for services since the waitlist because service delivery depends on the application date.

Question: When the Order of Selection first went into effect, there were two issues holding up funding. What is the status of that now? Are we anticipating any change soon?

Answer: The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation continues to await confirmation of total funding and any additional COLA adjustments.

Question: Has OVR received any additional funding or reallocations?

Answer: Yes. KYOVR received an additional reallocation award earlier in the fall (announced around August), in addition to the regular grant award.

Question: Do both the financial and regulatory issues need to be resolved before categories can reopen?

Answer: Yes, both must be addressed before reopening categories.

- The definition issue must be finalized through approval of the emergency regulations.
- The financial issue requires having sufficient funding available to serve additional individuals.

Question: Is there concern that delays or reduced spending might impact Kentucky's federal allocation in the future?

Answer: No. There is no indication that Kentucky's future allocation will be negatively affected.

Question: Are OVR staff continuing to serve active cases during the waitlist period?

Answer: Yes. OVR continues to serve individuals with active cases, and counselors are actively helping clients identify comparable benefits and community resources.

Question: Are RSA staff affected by the shutdown, and will that delay funds or communication?

Answer: RSA has advised KYOVR to continue submitting required reports and maintain regular operations while awaiting further updates.

Legislative Liaison Position | Bylaws Discussion

The Committee discussed proposed revisions to the Council's bylaws to clarify and strengthen the Legislative Liaison role, ensuring clear authority, accountability, and alignment with Cabinet policies and statutory requirements.

Below is proposed language:

In addition to the annual report submitted by the Council (KRS 151B.213(5)), the legislative liaison shall communicate with the legislative and executive branch about the Council's progress pursuant to KRS 151B.212-213 as needed, and as approved by the Executive Committee.

- ***The legislative liaison shall, on behalf of the Council, direct communication with the legislative branch to the relevant legislative committees and in consultation with the Department of Workforce Development;***
- ***The legislative liaison shall, on behalf of the Council, direct communication with the legislative branch to the relevant legislative committees and in consultation with the Department of Workforce Investment;***
- ***The legislative liaison shall remain abreast of the work of the Statewide Council for Vocational Rehabilitation to ensure Employment First Council work is separate and distinct.***

Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator, Nanci Howard will confirm whether Cabinet review occurs before or after Council approval.

The Legislative Liaison position is currently vacant following a prior resignation. Council member, Andrew Johnson, expressed interest in serving. His nomination will be presented at the January 2026 quarterly council meeting. Election of officers will also be held January 2026.

Public Comments

None.

Adjournment

Employment First Council Committee Interim Chair, Katie Wolf Whaley, thanked everyone for their contribution and adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting Date

December 2025

To be determined